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JEPH LOEB • TIM SALE

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Book Three: STEPPING INTO THE RING

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Dear Karen,
I know that you will never read what I am writing.

But, somehow, I'm finding the more I put down on paper, the closer I feel to you.

OKAY.

WHICH ONE OF YOU *SHYSTERS* IS NELSON AND WHICH ONE IS MURDOCK?

Book Three: STEPPING INTO THE RING

SOMEBODY GET ME A CAMERA —

I THINK I'VE *FINALLY* FOUND *THE THING'S* GOOD SIDE!

NELSON AND MURDOCK

BENJAMIN J. GRIMM!

WE DO *NOT* REFER TO LAWYERS AS *SHYSTERS!*

We were just starting out, remember, Karen? You had agreed to be our secretary. Foggy had found us the office, the furniture, practically everything.

All we needed now were some clients.

I don't think any of us imagined our first ones would be who they turned out to be.

HEY! OVER HERE! IT'S THE FANTASTIC FOUR!

ACTUALLY, BEN, WHEN I ASKED YOU TO GET OUT AND SEE IF YOU COULD FIND MISTER MURDOCK --

-- I DIDN'T THINK YOU WOULD TAKE ME *LITERALLY.* THEY *DO* HAVE A FRONT ENTRANCE.

I couldn't believe how loud the Thing's heartbeat was. It made him seem even larger and I could tell he was huge.

I admit, I actually entertained the idea they had discovered my secret.

That I was New York's newest super-hero, Daredevil.

That I mattered to them...

I'M MATT MURDOCK.

YES, SIR, MISTER, UH, THING, SIR, *THAT* IS MATT MURDOCK.

THE *BLIND* GUY! YER KIDDIN' ME, RIGHT?

BEN!

MISTER MURDOCK WAS AT THE *TOP* OF HIS CLASS AT *COLUMBIA LAW* WHERE A NUMBER OF MY CLOSE ASSOCIATES RECOMMENDED HIM HIGHLY.

IT'S... *"MATT."*

HOW'S THAT, SON?

I'D PREFER TO BE CALLED *"MATT."*

"MISTER MURDOCK" SOUNDS SO... *"MISTER MURDOCK."*

Thinking back on it now, that was my Father talking. But, somehow, it seemed like the right thing to say at the time.

REED. WE HIRIN' THESE BUMS, OR WHAT?

MATT. IF YOU'RE OPEN TO IT, WE'VE GOT SOME LEGAL WORK THAT NEEDS ATTENDING.

THE LEASE ON THE BAXTER BUILDING, PATENTS, THAT SORT OF THING?

WE'D BE HAPPY TO. AND ANYTHING ELSE YOU MIGHT WANT TO BRING US, MISTER RICHARDS.

FINE, THEN. DRAW UP A RETAINER AGREEMENT AND BE SURE TO INCLUDE THE COST OF REPAIRING YOUR WINDOW AND WALL.

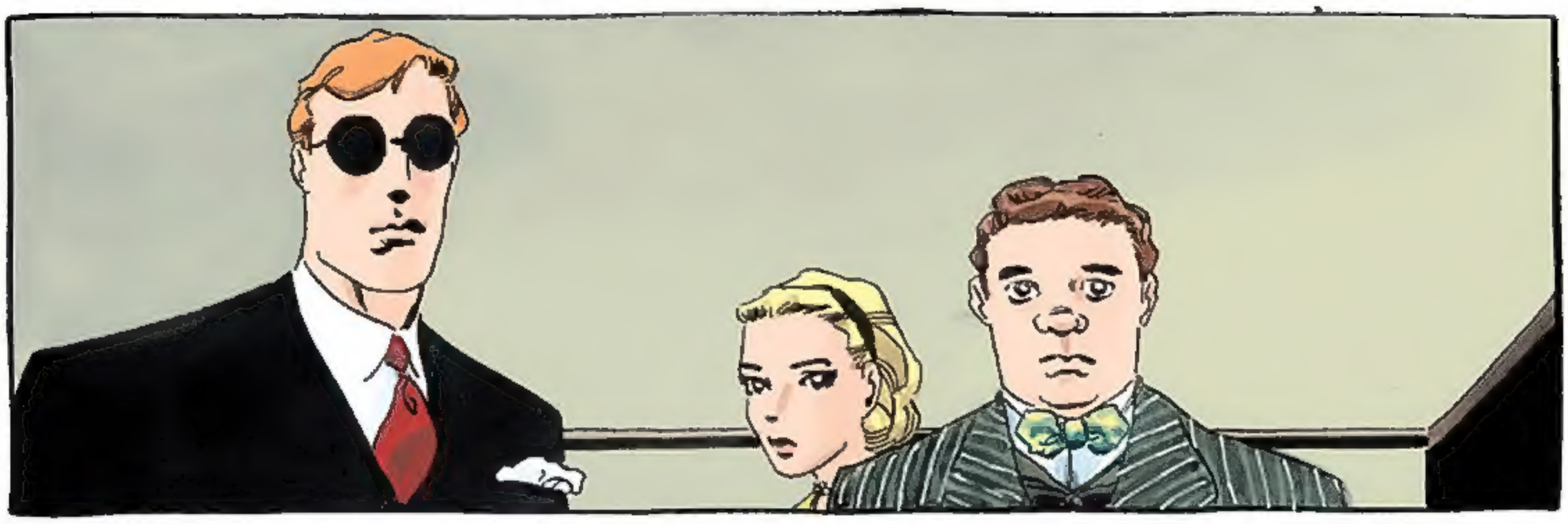
WE WILL, SIR.

NELSON MURDOCK

OH, AND MATT.

YES, SIR?

IT'S "REED."



WE'VE GOT OUR FIRST CLIENTS! WE'VE GOT OUR FIRST CLIENTS!
MISTER NELSON!
IT'S "FOGGY," KAREN.
"MISTER NELSON SOUNDS SO... MISTER NELSON!"
HA! CLASSIC MATT! I ALMOST WET MY PANTS! TELLING *THE* REED RICHARDS WHAT TO CALL HIM!

PLEASE DON'T MAKE FUN OF MISTER MURDOCK.
I THINK WE SHOULD BE VERY PROUD OF WHAT HE DID TODAY.
When you said that, your heart skipped a beat. What you didn't know was that mine did as well.

HEY, I DON'T CARE *WHAT* THEY CALL HIM, AS LONG AS THEIR CHECK CLEARS!
KAREN, WE'VE GOT TO GO OUT AND CELEBRATE. DRINKS TONIGHT AT *THE MARLIN CAFE.*
THE...MARLIN? FOGGY, IF KAREN IS GOING TO JOIN US, SHOULDN'T WE FIND SOME PLACE --
-- C'MON! OUR OLD COLLEGE WATERING HOLE? SHE'LL LOVE IT!
In the end, it wasn't worth arguing about. The way you said, "I think we should be very proud of what he did today" --
-- I forgot all about the Fantastic Four and what they thought.
On that day, I mattered to you.

I couldve taken the subway uptown. Or the bus. Or a taxi.

But, with you on my mind, I thought I could fly.

And I thought about Thor and Iron Man and heroes like that who really could fly and I laughed to think people now might use my name in the same sentence.

It was almost surreal. Hiding my costume. Changing in the shadows.

I had even thought ahead to remove my mask last in case someone should see me.

A grown man taking off his clothes in an alley. I thought that was against the law.

Despite all that had happened to me, some things never changed. I hadn't set foot in the Marlin Cafe since college, but Antonio was still behind the bar acting like I had been there the night before.

Pacifico, the mad poet, still recited to anyone who would listen. The Tiger Lady still growled and hissed into her drink.

BUENAS NOCHES, SEÑOR MATT!

BUENAS NOCHES, ANTONIO. ESTA USTED BIEN?

SI, GRACIAS. EL SEÑOR FOGGY IS IN THE BACK. CON UNA CHICA MUY BONITA.

GROWWW HISSSS

"SI DE PRONTO NO EXISTES, SI DE PRONTO NO VIVES, YO SEGUIRE VIVIENDO."

The stench of cigarette smoke was thick and nauseating. The soap bar in the urinal in the Men's room was more refreshing.

MATT! MATT! GET IN HERE!

MISTER MURDOCK, DO YOU NEED ANY HELP?

But one thing had changed about the place. I could tell you were wearing "Charlie".

They don't make that perfume anymore.

It's gone now...

THAT'S THE GUY WE BEEN WAITING FOR?

BIG JOKE, *FAT BOY.* NOW TAKE *HELEN KELLER* HERE OUTSIDE AND GIVE US BACK THE TABLE.

HEY, DID YA HEAR HOW HELEN KELLER BURNED HER FINGERS?

SHE WAS TRYING TO READ THE WAFFLE IRON!

DON'T LET THEM BOTHER YOU, MISTER MURDOCK.

ARE THEY BOTHERING *YOU,* KAREN?

WHY...NO. BUT, THEY'VE SAID SUCH HORRIBLE THINGS --

-- WOULD YOU MIND HOLDING MY JACKET?

EXCUSE ME?

MY JACKET. I COULD HANG IT ON THE BACK OF THE STOOL IF YOU'D PREFER.

I...NO...THAT IS, I WOULDN'T MIND. YOU'RE NOT REALLY GOING TO PLAY THEM, ARE YOU?

FIVE DOLLARS A BALL, BOYS?

RACK 'EM, FOGGY.

WHY DOES HELEN KELLER PLAY THE PIANO WITH ONE HAND?

SHE SINGS WITH THE OTHER.

THOP!

THOP!

HAVE YOU SEEN THE NEW HELEN KELLER DOLL?

WIND IT UP AND IT WALKS INTO WALLS.

TAK

TAK

TAK

POK

POK

THOP!

CH-CHAK!

MISTER NELSON — HOW DOES HE...?

HE JUST *CAN*, KAREN. JUST LIKE YOU CAN START CALLING ME *"FOGGY" ANY* TIME YOU WANT.

WHAT DID HELEN KELLER'S PARENTS DO TO PUNISH HER?

-- REARRANGED THE FURNITURE.

CRAK!

-- WASHED HER HANDS OUT WITH SOAP.

THOP!

-- PUT HER IN A ROUND ROOM AND TOLD HER THERE'S A PENNY IN THE CORNER.

CH-CHAK!

DO YOU KNOW THE PROBLEM WITH HELEN KELLER JOKES, FOGGY?

YOU'VE HEARD THEM ALL *IN BRAILLE* BEFORE.

THANK YOU FOR HOLDING MY JACKET, KAREN.

YOU'RE...

...WELCOME.

MISTER MURDOCK.

CAFE

YOUR COACH, MY LADY.

WHY, THANK YOU, LORD *HIC* NELSON.

I should've known right then that Foggy had set his cap on you.

For a man with "radar sense" I sometimes sure could miss the easy ones.

HEY, PAL, MIND IF I GO WITH...

IN·CAFE

MARKLIN CAFE

BEER SPIRITS WINE

HIC

FOGGY, WILL YOU PLEASE SEE TO IT THAT KAREN GETS HOME SAFELY?

YOU'RE *HIC* YOU CAN GET HOME SAFELY, MISTER MURDOCK?

YOU HAVE THE HICCUPS, KAREN.

HERE'S WHAT YOU DO.

YOU CUT A WEDGE OF LEMON. SPRINKLE A LITTLE SUGAR ON IT. ADD A DASH OF WORCESTERSHIRE SAUCE.

THEN, BITE THROUGH THE LEMON AND SWALLOW IT WHOLE. NOT THE PEEL, OF COURSE.

AND NO MORE HICCUPS.

I DO?

HIC

I GUESS I DO.

YOU'RE A VERY UN*HIC*USUAL MAN, MISTER MURDOCK.

GOOD NIGHT, KAREN. I'LL SEE YOU TOMORROW.

Marlin CAFE

LET'S NOT DO THIS HERE ON THE STREET.

THREE COLLEGE KIDS BEATING ON A *BLIND* MAN.

YOU'LL BE ON THE ELEVEN O'CLOCK NEWS.

SUIT YOURSELF.

YOU WANNA KNOW WHAT *I* THINK, *"HELEN"*?

NOT REALLY.

I THINK YOU AREN'T *REALLY* BLIND AND YOU AND YOUR FAT FRIEND HUSTLED US.

THEN, YOU'RE MISTAKEN.

AT LEAST ABOUT THE *"MY NOT BEING BLIND"* PART.

AND I *SHOULD* FEEL BAD ABOUT THE *"HUSTLING YOU"* PART.

BUT, I DON'T LIKE *HELEN KELLER* JOKES.

OR THE PEOPLE WHO TELL THEM.

BRAK!

My father would talk about never leading with your left.

FAP

BDIF

DONK

Since he was a Southpaw, it meant his left-handed punch was his best stuff.

HA! MISSED! YOU *GOTTA* BE BLIND!

TOK

TOK

TOK

TOK

TOK

THUP

SURK

If you lead with your left, he would drill into me, your opponent will know what you have and you lose your advantage.

I guess that's why I didn't tell you right away how I felt about you.

I miss my father, Karen. Some days, I admit, I miss him even more than I miss you. I hope you can understand that. I loved you both in different ways and both so very much.

WHAT DO YOU WANT, MURDOCK?

YOU'RE ALREADY LOOKING AT A *DEAD* MAN.

WHAT THE HELL MORE COULD YOU POSSIBLY WANT?

SLADE...

It was an election year and the District Attorney wanted to make an example of someone to show he was tough on crime.

Slade, the man who killed my father, was swiftly given the death penalty.

YOU WANT ME TO SAY THAT I'M SORRY?

WELL, I'M NOT.

YOUR FATHER WAS A *BUM.*

HE *AGREED* TO TAKE A DIVE AND THEN, HE BACKED OUT ON IT.

IN *MY* BUSINESS, YOU DON'T DO THAT.

YOU SHOULDA *SEEN* IT, KID. I PUT THE GUN UP TO THE BACK OF YOUR OLD MAN'S HEAD AND BLEW HIS BRAINS OUT.

OH.

THAT'S RIGHT.

YOU *CAN'T* SEE.

I WANT TO KNOW WHO HIRED YOU.

YOU *ALREADY* KNOW THAT. IT WAS *SWEENEY*. *"THE FIXER."*

I *TESTIFIED* AGAINST HIM AND EVERYTHING, FOR ALL THE GOOD IT DID ME.

NO. I WANT TO KNOW WHO *SWEENEY* WORKED FOR.

WHO FIXED THINGS FOR THE FIXER?

OH, NO. YOU AIN'T GETTIN' THAT FROM ME.

WHY NOT? YOU ALREADY SAID I WAS LOOKING AT A DEAD MAN.

MAYBE I COULD GET YOUR SENTENCE COMMUTED OR, AT LEAST, POSTPONED PENDING --

I SAID, *"NO."*

WHY?

*'CAUSE I GOT **KIDS**, YOU LITTLE STRUNZ'!*

YOU GET IT NOW?

*OR ARE YOU AS **DEAF** AS YOU ARE **BLIND?***

HEY, MURDOCK.

THERE *IS* SOMETHING YOU CAN DO FOR ME THOUGH.

NEXT TIME YOU COME AND SEE ME?

BRING ME SOME OF THEM *PISTACHIO NUTS.*

THEY DON'T HAVE THEM HERE. CAN YOU BELIEVE THAT?!

PISTACHIO NUTS...!

No matter what else was going on, I could always return to the work. When I was dealing with the law, the world had order. Things made sense. Things got done.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO, MISTER NELSON.

WHO TO TURN TO -- WHO I CAN TRUST?

YOU CAN TRUST US, GRACE.

DIPLOMA

ATE

THANK YOU.

HERE COMES MATT NOW.

KAREN.

MISTER MURDOCK.

MM

MATT, I WANT YOU TO MEET GRACE --

-- NO LAST NAMES, PLEASE. I KNOW ALL ABOUT *"ATTORNEY/CLIENT PRIVILEGE"* -- BUT NOT NOW.

NOT *YET.*

AS I WAS TELLING MISTER NELSON, I DON'T LIVE IN NEW YORK CITY.

MY HUSBAND -- WAS A GOOD MAN. AN *IMPORTANT* MAN.

AND I DID SOME THINGS -- SOME *TERRIBLE* THINGS. BUT I DID THEM TO PROTECT *HIM*.

AND NOW SOMEONE HAS FOUND OUT.

HE'S THREATENED TO EXPOSE ME -- TO SEND ME TO *JAIL* IF I DON'T PAY HIM MONEY.

CAN YOU TELL US WHO THIS PERSON IS?

I -- I SHOULDN'T HAVE COME HERE.

HE'LL FIND ME.

THAT'S WHAT HE DOES!

SO.

HOW'S THE *REST* OF YOUR DAY BEEN GOING?

SHE WAS *LYING*. I DON'T KNOW ABOUT WHAT, BUT SHE WAS LYING ABOUT SOMETHING.

HOW CAN YOU --? I KNOW, I KNOW, YOU JUST *CAN*. RIGHT, PARTNER?

SLAM!

PRIVATE

It was much later when I heard him coming up from the street. It was even before you looked up.

CAN I HELP YOU?

YOU CERTAINLY CAN.

PRIVATE

His heartbeat fluttered -- For want of a better word -- at a faster rate than any man's I had ever heard.

BUT, I'M USED TO HELPING MYSELF.

And his scent was more like that of a bird's.

SIR, YOU *CAN'T* JUST WALK IN THERE WITHOUT --

DIPLOMA

IT'S ALL RIGHT, KAREN. LET HIM IN.

GOOD AFTERNOON, GENTLEMEN.

I BELIEVE IN COMING STRAIGHT TO THE POINT.

A YOUNG WOMAN CAME TO SEE YOU THIS AFTERNOON AND, NO DOUBT, TOLD YOU SOME *SCURRILOUS* AND *LIBELOUS* THINGS ABOUT ME.

AND YOU ARE...?

MY REAL NAME IS OF LITTLE IMPORTANCE, ONLY THAT MY BUSINESS ASSOCIATES REFER TO ME AS...

...THE OWL.

AND I WISH TO EMPLOY YOUR SERVICES.

LOEB SALE '2001